DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 320 IR 005 361

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TITLE The Use of Stereotypes in Mass Media Advertising: Blacks in Magazine, Newspaper and Television Ads.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Advertising (Knoxville, Tennessee, April 19-22, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Role; *Black Stereotypes; Business Communication; *Literature Reviews; *Mass Media; *Media Research; Publicize; Television Commercials

ABSTRACT

A brief review of the literature on the use of black stereotypes in mass media advertising, and the results of a current study in this area are presented. Data were gathered by analysis of 1,536 ads in six general interest magazines and 4,371 ads in the New York Times over a one month period, and 368 television commercials on three networks over a two week period. The current magazine data support the previous findings that blacks appear in relatively few ads (less than 7%) and then, usually in a crowd scene or an institutional ad. Newspaper data support some previous findings. People appeared in less than 32% of the newspaper ads, and of these, 5% had one black person in them. Again the common setting was a crowd scene or institutional ad. Television data showed 5.5% of commercials with people containing a black person. The authors suggest an increasing tendency to exclude blacks from newspaper ads and to include blacks in magazines and television ads, but usually in background roles. The limitations of this research are discussed. (DAG)

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THE USE OF STEREOTYPES IN MASS MEDIA ADVERTISING: BLACKS IN MAGAZINE, NEWSPAPER AND TELEVISION ADS

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INTRODUCTION

For some time now civil rights leaders have been pressuring advertisers to: (1) increase the number of jobs available to black models and actors and (2) improve the image of blacks by portraying them in non-derogatory situations. Since 1963 these spokesmen have demanded "more than token adjustments" in the racial composition of all ads with special emphasis placed on television commercials.[1]

To what extent have advertisers and agencies complied with these demands? Through the years a number of researchers have attempted to answer that question. In this paper we will examine some of the research on the topic as well as report the results of our own studies to see what changes have occurred in the last few years in the frequency of appearance of blacks and roles portrayed by blacks in magazine, newspaper, and television advertising.[2]

THE STUDY FINDINGS

Blacks in Magazine Advertising

For many years writers have been discussing the roles portrayed by blacks in the mass media. Motion pictures provided the earliest public portrayal of black people and, unfortunately, the films were almost uniformly anti-black in their themes.[3] More than 40 years ago, Edgar Dale alluded to the enormous power wielded by the motion picture industry in its characterization of ethnic groups:

> One way in which prejudice may be shown is through using the characters as clowns or buffoons. While some might object to classifying this as a form of race preju-

> dice, nevertheless none of us would like to have our own race constantly presented in this light.[4]

Not until fairly recently, however, have researchers begun to seriously examine the roles portrayed by blacks in mass media advertising. From twelve to sixteen minutes of every hour of commercial television and more than 50% of the space in many newspapers and magazines is devoted to ads. These messages are primarily aimed at selling products rather than entertaining the viewer or reader. Moreover, in the United States, the commercial sponsorship system largely determines what type of programs we will see and how much news we will get. The portrayal of blacks in mass media advertising is certainly a subject worth considering.

In 1953 Shuey, King, and Griffith reported a study in which they analyzed the occupational status of blacks in ads from 292 issues of Life, Saturday Evening Post, Time, the New Yorker, Ladies' Home Journal and Collier's from the 1949-1950 period.[5] These researchers found blacks in less than 1% of the ads in the issues studied and in less than 3% of the non-advertising material. Moreover, nearly 80% of all the blacks that did appear in ads were cooks, maids and servants for whites.

The advertisement portion of the Shuey et al. study was replicated by Cox in 1967 and 1968.[6] Cox noted that barely more than 2% of all identifiable adults were blacks in the magazine ads he studied. Significant shifts had occurred, however, in the 15 years since the Shuey study in the occupations portrayed by the black characters. In 1967 over 55% of the black adults portrayed entertainer, sportsman, professional, business, student, or clerical roles while in the 1958 Shuey study only 6% of the blacks could be found in such roles.

Colfax and Sternberg questioned the qualitative presentation of blacks when they did a second replication of Cox's study in 1970.[7] In the print ads they examined: (1) 40% of all those with blacks showed blacks on the covers of record albums being advertised, (2) more than half of all the blacks on non-record album ads were "token blacks," appearing with 5 or more white people at the same time, (3) one-third of the non-record album ads had only black children in them, and (4) another 10% of the non-record album ads showed blacks as "losers," receiving welfare or charity.

Kassarjian examined the roles portrayed by blacks in 12 general circulation magazines in 1964-1965 and again in the same magazines in 1969. Although the total number of blacks in ads had tripled by 1969, he still found blacks in less than 2% of all ads.[8]

Our own analysis indicates that few if any significant changes have taken place in the past few years in the roles portrayed by blacks in consumer magazine advertising.

Data for our study was gathered by analyzing 1536 ads of 1/4 page or greater that appeared in popular general interest consumer magazines during the month of October 1974. (The possible influence of this type of sampling procedure will be discussed later in this paper.) Two specific areas were examined: the frequency of appearance of blacks in magazines (Table 1), and the roles portrayed by blacks in magazines (Table 2).

Although the sample used in the magazine portion of the study was small, two significant points stand out. First, blacks appear in relatively few mass circulation magazine ads. (In our sample less than 7% of the ads with people in them contained a black.)

TABLE 1

FREQUENCY OF APPEARANCE OF BLACKS IN MASS CIRCULATION CONSUMER MAGAZINE ADVERTISING

Weekly Magazines

Newsweek (4 issues in October 1974)

	Ads without people	Ads with people	
		non-blacks only	with blacks
3 or more pages	3	2	
2 pages	16	23	5
1 page	93	98	4
2/3 page	25	18	1
1/3 page	27	1	
	164 (51%)	142 (46%)	10 (3%)

New Yorker (4 issues in October 1974)

	Ads without people	Ads with people	
		non-blacks only	with blacks
3 or more pages	9	2	
2 pages	108	18	
1 page	29	104	2
2/3 page	11	33	1
1/3 page	177	125	
	334 (54%)	282 (46%)	3 (0%)

Time (4 issues in October 1974)

	Ads without people	Ads with people	
		non-blacks only	with blacks
3 or more pages	2	2	
2 pages	14	24	4
1 page	66	77	4
2/3 page	20	18	2
1/3 page	9	6	
	111 (45%)	127 (51%)	10 (4%)

Monthly Magazines

Esquire (October 1974 issue)

	Ads without people	Ads with people	
		non-blacks only	with blacks
3 or more pages			
2 pages	5	11	2
1 page	41	61	3
2/3 page	2	9	
1/3 page	15	6	
	63 (41%)	87 (56%)	5 (3%)

TABLE 1 continued

Playboy (October 1974 issue)

Ads without people	Ads with people: non-blacks only	Ads with people: with blacks
3 or more pages	1	
2 pages	4	
1 page	31	24	
2/3 page	3	2	
1/3 page	10	15	
	45 (50%)	45 (50%)	0 (0%)

Readers Digest (October 1974 issue)

Ads without people	Ads with people: non-blacks only	Ads with people: with blacks
3 or more pages	1	3	
2 pages	5	11	1
1 page	40	30	2
1/2 page	6	4	
	52 (50%)	48 (47%)	3 (3%)

TABLE 2

ROLES PORTRAYED BY BLACKS IN MASS CIRCULATION
CONSUMER MAGAZINE ADVERTISING

Newsweek (4 issues in October 1974)

1 pg.	Zenith television ad--6 of 31 people in crowd scene
2 pg.	1 of 3 people in go Army ad (soldiers)
2/3 pg.	Only character in Tareyton cigarette ad
2 pg.	1 of 17 people in Chrysler Fury ad
1 pg.	2 black children only characters in Bell Telephone ad
1 pg.	1 of 6 people in Bethlehem Steel institutional ad
2 pg.	1 of 17 people in Puerto Rican tourist ad (waiter)
1 pg.	6 of 26 people in Join the Army ad (soldier)
2/3 pg.	Only character in Tareyton cigarette ad

New Yorker (4 issues in October 1974)

2/3 pg.	1 black child in NAACP Emergency Relief Fund ad
1 pg.	1 of 3 people in Harbor Master topcoat ad
1 pg.	1 black child in Save the Children Foundation ad

Time (4 issues in October 1974)

1 pg.	1 of 12 illustrations in Mobil showcase ad showed blacks
2 pg.	2 of 22 firemen in Union Carbide institutional ad
1 pg.	2 black children only characters in Bell Telephone ad
2/3 pg.	Only character in Minolta camera ad
1 pg.	2 of 7 people in "Villa Alegre ad" for public television show sponsored by Exxon
2 pg.	1 of 17 people in Puerto Rican tourist ad (waiter)
2 pg.	1 of 10 people in IBM institutional ad (blue collar worker)
2 pg.	2 of 26 people in Join the Army ad (soldiers)
1 pg.	1 of 9 people in ITT institutional ad (blue collar worker)
2/3 pg.	Only character in Tareyton cigarette ad

Esquire (October 1974 issue)

1 pg.	1 of 24 book covers illustrated in book club ad
2 pg.	1 of 8 people in Join the Navy ad (sailor)
1 pg.	1 of 4 people in Harbor Master top coat ad
2 pg.	2 of 26 people in Join the Army ad (soldier)
1 pg.	1 of 9 people in Kawasaki motorcycle ad (chauffeur)

Playboy (October 1974 issue)

[no ads with blacks in them in the October issue]

TABLE 2 continued

Readers Digest (October 1974 issue)

2 pg.	4 of 13 children in American Motors "help young America" institutional ad
1 pg.	1 of 4 people in Chrysler Duster ad
1 pg.	1 of 7 people in Kretschmer "wheat germ" ad

Although detailed data was not kept on the number of blacks and whites shown in the sampled ads, the number of blacks would seem to be far less than 7% of the people shown. Second, when a black did appear it was usually in a crowd scene or in an institutional ad. Only rarely were blacks shown in product ads. The Tareyton and Minolta ads were the only exception to this rule.

Blacks in newspaper advertising

Blacks do not fare well at all in newspaper advertising. William Boynton, one of the first researchers to examine the frequency of appearance of blacks in newspaper advertising, sampled 3,878 pages drawn from 43 issues of the New York Times randomly chosen from the period from November 1, 1963 to December 14, 1964.[9] Sixteen of the issues were Sunday editions. Whole copies of the paper were studied weekdays and the main news section and the New York Times Magazine section on Sundays. Out of approximately 20,000 ads that appeared in the sample, Boynton could find only 11 ads with photographs or sketches of persons obviously intended to represent blacks.

Boynton also examined smaller samples of the December 1964 issues of the Chicago Tribune (out of 380 pages of paper, he found two ads with blacks), the Los Angeles Times (out of 736 pages, he found 6 ads with blacks), and the Philadelphia Inquirer including Today magazine (out of 272 pages, he found no ads with blacks).

Our own analysis supported the Boynton findings. We examined 4184 ads that appeared in the New York Times "late city edition" and 187 ads that appeared in the New York Times Magazine in

January 1975. Ads smaller than 1/4 page, ads in the movie and theatre sections, and ads in the New York Times Book Review section were not included in the sample. Regional material distributed in New Jersey, and in Brooklyn, Queens, and Long Island was also excluded from the analysis.

Less than 32% of the ads in the New York Times sample contained clearly identifiable pictures or illustrations of people and of these ads, only 5% contained at least one black character (see Table 3). Less than 2% of the ads in the New York Times Magazine contained a black.

If one were to exclude ads for television programs, records, travel, and ads seeking investors in the Ivory Coast, less than 1% of the ads with people in them in the New York Times would contain a black (see Table 4). Most of the ads with blacks in them were repeated many times over the 31 day period, many were institutional ads, and most of the ads showed the black character or characters in crowd scenes. Although no detailed record was kept of the number of black and white characters in the sampled ads, the actual number is probably far below 5%.

Blacks in Television Advertising

One of the earliest studies of the frequency of appearance of blacks in television programming and advertising was done by L. Plotkin in 1962.[10] In his report Plotkin mentioned that a black actor or actress appeared on television an average of only once every 2½ hours. In a 1967 study, Richard Lemon found that less than 3% of all commercials portrayed blacks, Orientals, Puerto Ricans, or Indians.[11] These same groups, however, could be seen in

TABLE 3

FREQUENCY OF APPEARANCE OF BLACKS IN NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING

New York Times (January 1975 issues)

	No people	with people	
		without blacks	with blacks
1/8 page	1797	582	13
1/4 page	613	339	28
1/2 page	317	260	9
1 page	123	85	18
	2850 (68%)	1266 (30%)	68 (2%)

New York Times Magazine (4 issues in January 1975)

	No people	with people	
		without blacks	with blacks
1/4 page	59	20	
1/2 page	11	19	1
1 page	22	56	—
	92 (49%)	95 (50%)	1 (0%)

TABLE 4

ROLES PORTRAYED BY BLACKS IN NEW YORK TIMES
ADVERTISING DURING JANUARY 1975

1. Only character in ad for Fordham Liberal Arts College
2. Several blacks on record jackets in Korvetts Discount Store ad
3. Ad for Mobil Showcase presentation "Ceremonies in Dark Old Men" on ABC
4. Ad for "Soul Free" local weekly TV series
5. Ad for insurance company showing a bunch of gangsters one of whom is black
6. Ad for ABC sports. Showed Mohammud Ali-George Forman fight
7. Ad for Sammy Davis Jr. at the Diplomat Hotel, Hollywood, Fla.
8. Ad for Della Reese at the Puerto Rican Sheraton Hotel
9. 3 native dancers in Home Lines cruise ad
10. See 3
11. American Airlines superbowl ad showing players
12. Ad promoting Atlanta. Congressman Young, a black, is featured.
13. Ad for "Get Christie Love"
14. See 2
15. Ad promoting today show. Black is 1 of 6 people in ad.
16. Magnavox double star savings ad featuring Frank Sinatra and Hank Aaron
17. Gimbels ad. Black is 1 of 6 models in ad
18. Sam Goody records ad. Blacks appear on record jacket covers.
19. See 2
20. New York Times ad. Black is 1 of 32 people in ad.
21. See 7
22. See 8
23. See 11
24. Ad for Smothers Brothers show with Redd Foxx. Black is 1 of 7 people in ad.
25. See 13
26. American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Gail Fisher is 1 of 4 people in ad.
27. Ad promoting ABC. Two illustrations with blacks out of 21 pictures in ad.
28. "The Jeffersons" premiere on CBS.
29. Alexander's for sale. 1 black model out of 12
30. Roche Chemicals. 1 part of montage of workers
31. See 2
32. Ebasco Services. 1 person out of 9 in ad is black.
33. See 7.
34. The Fifth Dimension at the Fountainbleu in Miami Beach.
35. See 8.

TABLE 4 continued

36. Princess Hotel, Bahamas. 1 of 5 people in ad.
37. Jamaica tourism ad. 1 of 6 pictures in ad features native dancers.
38. East New York Savings Bank. 1 of 11 illustrations in ad.
39. Black stewardess featured in United Airlines ad.
40. Ad for Smothers Brothers show. 3 of 12 people in ad are black.
41. TWA ad. 1 of 30 people in ad is black.
42. Bell Telephone ad features a black.
43. "Adam 12" TV ad shows 1 of 13 people as black.
44. Eastern Airlines ad shows black native dancer.
45. Dime Savings Bank features 1 black out of 5 people in ad mentioning higher education loans.
46. See 16.
47. 2 of 6 models in Abraham and Strauss sale ad is black.
48. 3 of 13 illustrations in Madison Square Garden ad shows blacks.
49. See 2.
50. See 20.
51. Series of ads featuring investment in the Ivory Coast.
52.
53.
54.
55.
56.
57. See 20.
58. See 7.
59. Lena Horne at Deauville in Miami Beach (1 of 5 in ad).
60. See 34.
61. See 8.
62. See 9.
63. Pan Am ad shows blacks in large crowd scene.
64. "Lucas Tanner" TV episode features 2 blacks.
65. "Get Christie Love" TV promotions.
66. "Barney Miller" TV promotion.
67. CBS family night ad shows 2 of 4 characters as black.
68. 1 of 18 in ABC "Hot L Baltimore" ad is black.

about one-fourth of all variety shows and one-fifth of all dramatic offerings.

By the early 1970s, the frequency of appearance of blacks in television ads had increased tremendously. Dominick and Greenberg reported a continuing and significant linear trend in the frequency with which blacks appeared in commercials. In a series of studies done for the American Association of Advertising Agencies between 1967 and 1969, they analyzed a week per year of prime-time (7:30 p.m.-11:00 p.m.) and day-time (1 p.m.-4 p.m.) television commercials on all 3 networks.[12] According to their findings about 4% of all commercials contained a black in 1967 (n=777); 6% of all commercials contained a black in 1968 (n=940), and 10% of all commercials contained a black in 1969 (n=1176). However, they also reported that blacks rarely appear in commercials alone or with other blacks. More typically they are shown in sizable groups with other actors. Moreover, the typical black in 1960 appears in a public service announcement; appears in a major, minor, or background role with equal frequency; usually does not speak or hold the product; seldom is the announcer, and is most likely pictured with whites.[13]

In a 1973 up-date of the earlier work, Dominick and Greenberg reported some significant changes in the frequency of appearance and use of blacks in prime-time television commercials.[14] For one thing, in 1973 blacks appeared in approximately 14% of all commercials (n=366) in a composite week of prime-time television. Among the trends reported are: (1) a significant increase in the use of blacks in background or walk-on roles, rather than major

roles, and (2) a significant distinction between ads with and without blacks in terms of the composition of the groups in the ads. Ads without blacks typically have 2 people in them, those with blacks have more than 6 people.[15]

Our own study of 368 prime-time television commercials aired on all 3 major networks during the last two weeks in January 1974 supported the Dominick and Greenberg conclusions. Ten percent (9.5% when duplicate commercials were removed from the sample) of all commercials in our study contained a black character, however, out of 770 identifiable people in the commercials coded, only 43 characters were blacks (5.5%). When duplicate ads were removed from the sample, we found blacks made up 5.9% of the characters in prime-time television commercials.

Although no attempt was made to code the actual roles played by all the characters in the commercials, several points regarding the roles portrayed by blacks were noted. Only one black was shown as an executive (a bank ad). Three blacks out of the total sample appeared as policemen. (One appeared in an antacid commercial while the other two had starring roles on two television series ads.) Sixteen of the 43 blacks identified in the sample were children. In only 4 instances did more than 1 black appear at the same time in a commercial.

Apparently the earlier uniformly negative stereotypes of blacks in films have given way to a specific absence of blacks from newspaper advertising and to what seems to be an increasing tendency to include blacks in magazine and television ads but usually only in background roles. Our analysis of the published research on

black stereotypes in the mass media as well as our own research leads us to believe that the following statement made by the Kerner Commission in 1968 about the role of the news media in causing and preventing civil disorders applies equally well to the mass media advertising situation today.[16]

> "If what the white American reads in newspapers or sees on television conditions his expectations of what is ordinary and normal in the larger society, he will neither understand nor accept the black American. By failing to portray the Negro as a matter of routine and in the context of the total society, the news media have, we believe, contributed to the black-white schism in this country."

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Before ending this discussion of black stereotypes, a few of the problems in conducting research of this type should be discussed.

There is little doubt in our minds that the sampling procedure used in many of the studies mentioned in this paper had a major impact on the results of the research. For example, Shuey, King and Griffith (1953) sampled ads from six different consumer magazines: Life, Saturday Evening Post, Time, the New Yorker, Ladies' Home Journal, and Collier's. What do these magazines really have in common? Besides the vehicles selected for study, perhaps the particular editions (Philadelphia Metropolitan Edition, Student Edition, Doctor's Edition, etc.) or months selected for study are atypical of the type of ads run throughout the rest of the country or ads run during other months of the year.

The samples used in the television studies can also be questioned. For one thing there is no convenient way of distinguishing network from spot and local announcements. Perhaps the results would have differed if only network commercials or only spot or local commercials had been examined; perhaps what is shown on one network is not typical of the types of commercials aired on the other networks; perhaps prime-time television commercials are significantly different from fringe-time or day-time commercials. In their study of female stereotypes in magazine advertising, Courtney and Whipple reported that during day-time television there are significantly more female characters used in ads. The opposite is true with prime-time television.[17] Their conclusion lends support to the hypothesis that the method of selecting commercials for analysis may significantly influence the study results.

A number of researchers examined every ad that showed an identifiable character without making an attempt to separate the ads in which the character played a primary role from those ads where the character played a secondary role. Also, rarely was an attempt made to separate the ads by size or color. Thus, a 2-page, 4-color ad was coded the same as a ¼ column black and white ad. Moreover, most of the researchers working in the area seem to ignore the problem of ad duplication. In both the magazine and television mediums, many ads are repeated. Repeated ads could have a significant effect on the researchers' conclusions.

Perhaps the coding procedures used in the studies significantly influence the results. Although the coders in most of the studies

mentioned seem to be well-trained and although attempts were made in most cases to measure inter-coder reliability, the problem of objectively classifying the variables of interest is a difficult one. For example, counting the frequency with which a role appears, noting the presence or absence of a particular role, or interpreting the role portrayed by the primary character in the ad might make a difference in how the data is interpreted.[18]

What effect will a study of this type have on television and print advertisers? The effect depends on the answers to two very important questions. Are target customers offended by the way in which blacks (or, for that matter, whites) are portrayed in ads? How does stereotyped portrayal affect advertising recall and more importantly, sales? These are significant questions that need further research and clarification, but it will be empirical data on these questions that is apt to cause the most changes in advertising strategies.

FOOTNOTES

[1]William Boyenton, "The Negro Turns to Advertising," Journalism Quarterly, Spring 1965, pp. 227-235.

[2]The authors are particularly indebted to Phil Pusey, Steve Hocker, George Williams, Jim Foster, Denise Wike, Harry Smith, and Fred Neal for their work in designing the research instruments, data collection, and data analyses for this study.

[3]Two of the best sources of information on blacks in films are: Peter Nobel, The Negro in Films (London: Skelton Robinson, 1948) and Edward Mapp, Blacks in American Films: Today and Yesterday (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1972).

[4]Edgar Dale, The Content of Motion Pictures (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1935), p. 55.

[5]Audrey Shuey, Nancy King, and Barbara Griffith, "Stereotyping of Negroes and Whites: An Analysis of Magazine Pictures," Public Opinion Quarterly, Summer 1953, pp. 281-287.

[6]Keith Cox, "Changes in Stereotyping of Negroes and Whites in Magazine Advertisements," Public Opinion Quarterly, Winter 1969-1970, pp. 603-606.

[7]J. David Colfax and Susan Sternberg, "The Perpetuation of Racial Stereotypes: Blacks in Mass Circulation Magazine Advertisements," Public Opinion Quarterly, Spring 1972, pp. 8-18.

[8]Harold Kassarjian, "The Negro and American Advertising, 1946-1965," Journal of Marketing Research, February 1969, pp. 29-39.

[9]William Boynton, "The Negro Turns to Advertising," Journalism Quarterly, Spring 1965, pp. 227-235.

[10]L. Plotkin, The Frequency of Appearance of Negroes on Television, a report for the Committee on Integration, New York Society for Ethnical Culture, 1964. Study reported in Bradley Greenberg and Sherrie Mazingo's Racial Issues in Mass Media Institutions. Report No. 16, Project CUP: Communication Among the Urban Poor, Department of Communication, Michigan State University, p. 28.

[11]Richard Lemon, "Black is the Color of TV's Newest Starts," Saturday Evening Post, November 30, 1968, pp. 42-44.

[12]Joseph Dominick and Bradley Greenberg, "Three Seasons of Blacks on Television," Journal of Advertising Research, April 1970, pp. 21-27.

[13]Ibid., p. 27.

[14]Bradley Greenberg and Sherrie Mazingo, Racial Issues in Mass Media Institutions. Report No. 16, Project CUP: Communication Among the Urban Poor, Department of Communication, Michigan State University, pp. 27-33.

[15]Ibid., p. 29.

[16]Kerner Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. (New York: Bantam Books Inc., 1968).

[17]Alice Courtney and Sarah Lockeretz, "A Woman's Place: An Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Magazine Advertisements," Journal of Marketing Research, February 1971, pp. 92-95.

[18]For an excellent discussion of the objectivity issue regarding content analysis, see Ole R. Holsti, Content Analyses for the Social Sciences and Humanities (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969), pp. 5-9.